

Smoking and Stress

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All people at some time in their lives are subjected to stress. Although everyone experiences stress, not everyone copes with it in the same way. Many people cope with stress by smoking. People who cope with stress by smoking do so for a variety of reasons according to the Tobacco Research and Intervention Program:

- Thinking that smoking a cigarette gives a much deserved break.
- Feel a sense of camaraderie because smoking is often a social activity.
- Knowing that smoking will make them feel better because it will relieve their nicotine withdrawal symptoms.

Although smokers may smoke to get quick relief from stress by lighting up, there is no empirical evidence that nicotine alleviates stress. In fact, studies have shown the opposite; that smokers have higher stress levels than non-smokers (Warburton, Revell, & Thompson, 1991; Jones & Parrott, 1997; West, 1992). Research shows that adult smokers experience periods of heightened stress between cigarettes, and that smoking only restores their stress levels to normal (Schachter, 1978; Hughes, Higgins, & Hatsukami, 1990; Parrott, Garnham, Wesnes, & Pincock, 1996; Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 1988). However, soon after smoking, they will require another cigarette to keep their stress at normal levels because if they don't they will experience the stress that comes from nicotine withdrawal. Research suggests that smoking does nothing to relieve stress and can only contribute to it (Parrott, A.C.1999).

There are healthier alternatives than smoking to cope with stress. Take the following suggestions from Familydoctor.org for example:

- Try to look at change as a positive challenge, not a threat.
- Don't worry about things you can't control, like the weather.
- Work to resolve conflicts with other people.
- Ask for help from friends, family or professionals.
- Set realistic goals at home and at work.
- Exercise on a regular basis.
- Eat well-balanced meals and get enough sleep.
- Meditate.
- Get away from your daily stresses with group sports, social events and hobbies.
- Prepare to the best of your ability for events you know may be stressful, like a job interview.

For more information on reducing stress and quitting smoking, visit these websites:

<http://www.apa.org/journals/features/amp5410817.pdf>
<http://www.smokefree.gov/pubs/ffree6.pdf>
<http://familydoctor.org/167.xml>

http://www.planetpsych.com/zPsychology_101/substance/smoking_stress.htm
<http://quitsmoking.about.com/od/stressmanagement/>
<http://www.gmu.edu/student/quitsmoking/stresstips.html>
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/stress>

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WEBSITES

“Stress, smoking, and mood.” Tobacco Research and Intervention Program at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute at the University of South Florida. Available for viewing at <http://www.smokefree.gov/pubs/FFree6.pdf>

“Stress: How to Cope Better with Life’s Challenges.” familydoctor.org editorial staff. Available for viewing at <http://familydoctor.org/167.xml>